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## Written Testimony for the Committee on Labor and Public Employees Supporting HB 5207: An Act Concerning Criminal Background Checks for Prospective State Employees. Submitted February 25, 2010

Dear Senator Prague, Representative Ryan and Members of the Committee:

My name is Nadine Nevins and I am the managing attorney of Connecticut Legal Services' (CLS) Bridgeport office and a member of the Bridgeport Reentry Collaborative (Collaborative). I submit this testimony on behalf of CLS and the Collaborative. HB 5207 would prohibit the state from requesting a consumer report and looking into a prospective employee's criminal history until a conditional offer of employment is made. This bill is an important first step towards rectifying the often insurmountable discrimination ex-offenders face in obtaining employment.

At Connecticut Legal Services we represent low-income people for free in civil matters. Some of our clients are ex-offenders, many of the spouses and fathers of our clients are ex-offenders. We work with many community and government organizations that assist low income people in their quest to re-enter the job market as do the members of the Collaborative. It has been through these associations that we have confronted the prevalent problem of people being rejected from jobs due to prior criminal records.

Clients and caseworkers share personal accounts of employers who refuse to give further consideration to a job applicant once he or she has honestly responded to an inquiry about the individual's prior criminal convictions. The rejections occur no matter how long ago the conviction and even in cases in which an arrest did not lead to a conviction.

The Urban Institute in a study entitled, *Employment After Prison: A Longitudinal Study of Releases in Three States*, released in October 2008, found that:

Having to provide criminal history information before the interview process eliminates many job opportunities for

former prisoners. Giving employers the opportunity to meet and speak with job applicants before discovering their criminal history has the potential to improve job outcomes for former prisoners.

It is a reality that more and more employers are doing background checks using consumer reports. The reports are cheap and easy to obtain. It used to be that you could get a job, and prove yourself before a record check came back or no record check was done at all. That opportunity no longer exists.

Thousands of people are released from state and federal prisons to Connecticut cities and towns each year. They are released in inordinate numbers to our big cities creating an underclass of people who are unable to support their families or contribute to the tax base because they cannot get jobs.

Bridgeport, New Haven, Hartford and Norwich have already recognized the economic and social benefits of helping this population and have passed their own versions of this bill.

The Bridgeport Reentry Collaborative is a large and diverse group in Bridgeport that formed in an effort to help ex-offenders in all aspects of their reentry into the community. Its members include local employers, DOC, DSS, DOL, ex-offenders, Career Resources, Family ReEntry, business people, the Center for Women and Family, federal court employees and many, many more. The Collaborative understands that employed people are less likely to recidivate so as a matter of public safety we should level the playing field for ex-offenders. Bill No. 5207 will help do that. It will not give ex-offenders an advantage over anyone else in seeking employment. It will just give them an opportunity to show that they are qualified for the job by virtue of their education, experience and skills and not knock them out of the running because of one aspect of their lives.

Connecticut Legal Services and the Bridgeport Reentry Collaborative supports extending the protections of Bill No. 5207 to private employers so that there are even more opportunities for ex-offenders to obtain gainful, permanent employment.

Thank you for your consideration.

Respectfully submitted,  
Nadine Nevins, Regional Director